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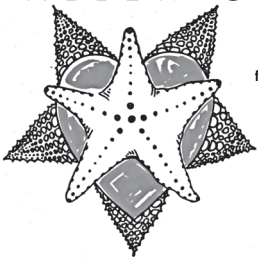


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## Heart like a Starfish

ALLEN CALLACI



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rock and roll,  
friendship, and a  
death-defying  
heart transplant

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May 4, 2016

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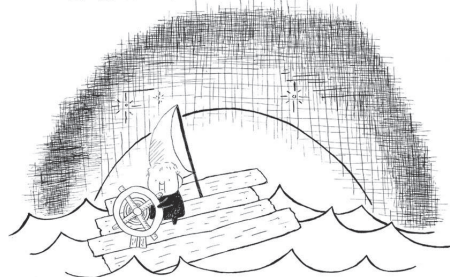
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## Oh the Moon



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ALTAI  
ANDRES PARADA

sunk in walkway cracks  
unused sun, the pavement hosts  
death of man and dog

NIGHT:

When the moon rose, the streetlights sparked up in unison,  
torching the city in their neon puke. The lights turned to  
glowing trees, branches buzzing. Beneath the trees, the city's  
nighttime beasts awoke in fevered heat.

I laid still, chest beading with pillsized sweat specks, clinging  
like a rosary. In the salty beads: exhausted prayer, "God, I am  
so fucking tired."

Aside from holy heat, there was a stray dog that had me  
bothered. She yapped like dirty thunder I couldn't help but  
hate.

I wanted to get up and kick the mutt, shoo her from  
rummaging through loud garbage. But, tucked tails get you  
feeling guilty. So, I just soaked in her bark.

A few times, I almost fell asleep.

But, the clink of a tail tipping a tin can would interrupt. The  
bitch would bark, jumbling my ear drums like hot caffeine.

I saw her pouncing on me, lashing teeth like tusks, flinging my  
gored corpse because she really was more scared of me than  
I was of her.

Or maybe I saw her place her chin on my chest, resting with  
me until morning, guarding me from the wild of Altai.

I do remember I snuck looks through my lashes and barely  
saw her head. She snuffled her black nose around my feet and  
wandered wet sniffs up my body to my mouth. She stopped,  
like a brown beard might be more than scented city scum—  
something besides a shroud for thin lips and littered teeth.  
Love lick.

I wanted to reach, to stroke her head. I lifted my hand but  
found no friend. She didn't love me, or kill me. She left like  
dogs run. And I just lay awake exactly like the faithless sleep.

DAY:

I thought we had shared a struggle, that the moon lit the same  
scared pain on our woolly bodies, that we limped on limbs  
wounded by the same city.

However, when it's hot and dark and dumpsters rumble with  
hungry dogs, I have nothing but apologies:

Forgive me. I have no soul, no faith, and no tail to tuck  
between my legs. Mama, I'm sorry I'm wild.

bone castanets  
clinking in a dumpster  
summer lightning



Brian Comer

DAILY GIL

ERAL



DOES IT NOT BLEED?

VARIATIONS ON THE THEME OF HARD-HEARTEDNESS  
AND OTHER MALADIES

ELIZABETH AYRE

when you asked me to tell you a secret,  
i told you that deep down, i believe all disease is psychological  
and can be cured by spiritual experience  
(just maybe not in this lifetime)

you called me a christian scientist  
and said that your theory is that  
everyone already has cancer  
from the moment they're born  
it's just a matter of when it rears its ugly head

before i met you i thought i had to hang onto everything:  
apricot pits, empty airplane-size liquor bottles,  
a picture of the sacred heart torn from a disintegrating paperback

i thought i needed to remember license plate numbers  
and the gestures of strangers

once, i found a polaroid album that had been left out in the rain  
it dripped as i picked it out of the trash  
discolored plastic bled in psychedelic patterns  
some figures still intact:  
a baby in a highchair, a girl rollerskating.  
how do you throw out a picture of a child?

i could pack a suitcase full of other people's mementos  
i piled them atop the heater in the small room i was renting—  
my shrine of precious trash

i heard on the radio that cats sleep in the areas  
of a room with the most electromagnetic radiation

what is this part of us that is more comfortable in filth,  
safer eating half-chewed meals alone in the car?

my heart aches for the plants  
that grow beside the freeway,  
and i wonder, is there any pain  
that is solely its own to bear?



# FEATURED ARTIST

*Isabel Reidy* is a visual artist and musician living in upstate New York. Fine Print had the pleasure of meeting Reidy at the Chicago Alternative Comics Expo, where we first encountered her eccentric—for a lack of a better word—comic book art. Reidy has published three comics: *1-800 KRAVLOX* (2012), *Powder Shiver* (2014), and *True Friendship Now* (2015). Apart from the recurrence of key images like telephones, dolphins, and genitalia, the common thread in Reidy’s work is, arguably, a profound and comically absurd search for self-discovery, fulfillment, and reformation. Reidy also writes and performs music under the moniker Izzy True; she recently released her *Troll EP* (Don Giovanni Records), illustrating the album art herself. Reidy illustrated the center spread for this issue of *Fine Print* and provided us with some insights into her artwork.

*Izzy True and Isabel Reidy: is there a difference?*

Isabel Reidy is on a deep, nebulous personal mission to inhabit Izzy True, Isabel Reidy’s final form.

*The themes of transformation or reformation come up in both 1-800 KRAVLOX and in True Friendship Now. Can you tell me more about the evolution of your artistic identity? Who were you when you started your artwork and who are you now?*

I started drawing when I was a kid because my older sister drew. She is five years older than me and was a cool goth who read *Dame Darcy* and *Jhonen Vasquez* comics. I got really serious about it when I got into anime. I was on the Internet all the time when I was a kid. When I was 12, I had a pretty dark year. I wasn’t in school and was only awake between the hours of 5PM and 5AM. I got into the furry fandom. It is an odd world full of really lonely, socially inept people. I say that fondly. At that age, in the place I was in, it made a lot of sense. It was incredibly fulfilling for me: a complete universe that did not require me to leave the house.

I was exposed to some weird shit, drew some weird donges for *Sailormoon* DVDs, and had a lot of adult friends on the computer. At some point I joined reality again and, wracked with feverish teenage shame, tried to distance myself from that stuff. I went into art school with the idea that I was going to be a fine artist. I had no idea what that meant. Turns out I have no interest in that world. I guess I started making the art that I care about when I went back to all of the gross, stupid stuff that attracted me to drawing in the first place. Like all people, I am in a constant state of transformation. This could be a conceit, or maybe just a part of being young, but I feel like I might be more impressionable than most people. I change very fast and all the time, so I am interested in change.

*When we first met we discussed Amazonian river dolphins. That said, what’s the deal with the dolphin character(s) in your books and illustrations?*

I have very mixed feelings about dolphins. They seem to be cruising at this crazy altitude spiritually and are also sexual in a way that terrifies me. Marine mammals are just incredibly fleshy. Whales, in general, possess a fathomless and ancient magic that is very sad to me. That being said, I think the first incarnation of the dolphin in my work was a caricature of the clientele of this crunchy store in my town that sells hand drums and corny hats for dudes with ponytails. The dolphin was playing a djembe and trying to get someone to check out his crystal collection. The dolphin gave up the drums and doesn’t want anyone to touch his crystals, thank you very much.

*Are there any other recurring visual themes or characters in your artwork?*

At this point, I pretty much draw three buddies. You’ve got your *Kravlox* (a gracious, omnipotent being of pure light), your *Monastic Pleasure Dolphin*, and your *Young Weird* (a nervous masturbator). As far as visual themes, genitals (all sorts), flesh, and telephones keep coming up in my drawings. I was going to say I have no idea where any of that comes from, but honestly I have a very complicated relationship with sex and sexuality that I do not fully understand and prefer not to process consciously.

*You’ve published a few books; do you have any in the works that you can describe for us?*

I only know that the next comic I make is going to be long. When I get going on a book it sort of takes over my life, so I’ve been hesitant to commit to a bigger project. But if I don’t push it farther soon, I’m going to be very unimpressed with myself. Right now I’m working on a new album though, so I’m trying to give that my full attention.

*Do you approach your drawings with a written narrative already scripted or do you develop the script as you draw?*

I usually get a very vague idea and just kind of dive in. I tend to work one or two pages out from where I am; the plot develops as I go along. I started working that way because not knowing what was coming next was the only way I could finish things. I stick with the book to find out what happens myself.

*Your writing, both in your books and in your posts on social media platforms, is really funny and often pretty poetic, if somewhat cryptic. Where do you find the words for your pieces? What do you write about?*

I’m pretty interested in god and the-void-where-god-isn’t, so I mostly write about longing and self-loathing. In terms of finding the words—this is a terrible answer, and I apologize—I am alive and interact with people and their various outputs; I have feelings and am stimulated by the world. When I’m at work or sitting around or talking to someone, a phrase or idea will mysteriously appear. If it’s good, I’ll think about it until I am forced to write it down. Then I write around it. On a side note, it’s funny that you say my writing is poetic, I guess I kind of see that, but poetic in a bad Shakespeare-type way or something. It’s so melodramatic and grandiose.

*Well the words you choose seem so deliberate and so charged with meaning that it is difficult not to look for some kind of poetic/pathetic truth in your writing: phrases like “Empty Empty Emptiness” and “I gushing platitudes and gratitudes / a sour untruth” in True Friendship Now come across, to me, as a lot more poetic than comical. Your writing can certainly be very funny, but it’s difficult to ignore the depth. What exactly do you think makes your writing melodramatic or grandiose?*

I guess I see those lines as funny. I think truth is a big part of humor. The jokester takes the risk, admits something shitty about themselves, and then the audience is free to recognize that in themselves without having to feel judged. There is a release that comes with that recognition. I think often the way we speak to ourselves, the way we think about our own feelings, is overblown and grandiose. I might think to myself “GO FUCK YOURSELF YOU HEINOUS SCAB. WHEN WILL YOUR TERRIBLE BODY FINALLY DIE?” and not question it too much. But when I write it out, it is ridiculous.

*Drawing or music: you have to pick one and give up on the other forever!*

Music. I would be very sad if I could never draw all these horrible creatures ever again, but ultimately I think music is more useful to other people.

*Can you tell us a little about the Troll EP and the music video for your single “Swole”?*

The *Troll EP* is a tape of rock ‘n’ roll music. I wrote most of it over the course of two months and then recorded it pretty much immediately. It was a slap dash thing, but I had the idea that I was going to move to California and I needed a tape of stripped back stuff so I could book shows and get a band together out there. I left California after about a month because I have no idea how to be an adult. I scurried back to my parents’ house, where I have lived for about 4 years at this point.

In terms of influences...I was raised on old-time and country music, but in the past few years I’ve gotten really into rock ‘n’ roll, specifically super cheesy crap: *Genesis*, *Phil Collins*, *Def Leppard*, *The Police*, *Steely Dan*, *Thin Lizzy*. I can’t get enough of that stuff right now. My biggest influence though is a folk guy named *Michael Hurley*. My dad loves him, so I’ve been listening to him my whole life. He writes these beautiful songs, some of them very sad, but is unafraid of jokes ‘n’ joy. He’s my gold standard for songwriting.

*Swole* is a song I wrote about lifting weights. Until very recently I was not a very active person. Like, I barely left the house, hated to walk anywhere, would ridicule the dumbdumbs in gym windows, to myself, as I walked past them. Then one of my friends pointed out that it would be cool to be strong, and I sort of got obsessed with the idea. I started lifting weights and running all the time. I’m by no means ripped, but I am much more in tune with my physicality now. I am more aware of how it feels to move and that has been really empowering. It’s a whole new way of existing, like a new dimension! So I guess the song is about that, sort of. The music video was heavily influenced by *Brad Neely*’s videos. I love him and have been hyucking it up to his jokes since I was in high school.

*What are your plans for the winter?*

I’m recording an album and going on two tours (a solo tour in February and a longer one with the full band in March), but I can’t talk too much about that stuff yet. I’m also hoping to spend a lot of time alone working on improving my mind, body, and spirit. I will definitely have a new book for the summer as well (I wrote that so I will do it).

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See more work by Isabel Reidy online at: <http://realbadguy.tumblr.com/>

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IRABU REIDY 2015




LOVE MYSELF, I THINK???





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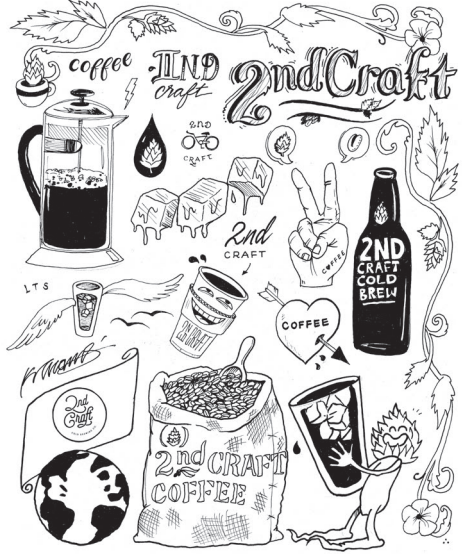
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NIGHTSCREEN

CLAIRE CRONIN

EPISODE I

In scenes of him, something misplaced—

a region of his face too large or slant  
eyes lusterless, black as cods

He sails our house in half a ship

EPISODE II

One of the dead comes back  
and all the power goes out in town

We have to do our eating and our  
speaking in the dark

One morning, I discover  
three small holes in my right arm  
as if it has been punctured with a fork

I show him this, he turns  
and in this way years pass

EPISODE III

He says he wants his shivering wife  
her ears stopped her eyes stopped

and the melancholy whirring of  
the screen that lights our room

I thought the movement of his hands  
meant mercy, gardens—

the way a storm directs a fish to net

Let me tell you about him:  
his breastbone is perfect

EPISODE IV

Before the screen, I lose my dreaming  
and only want to enter that bright well—

sit in the beautiful apartments of the dead  
who laugh and flirt in phosphorescent light

EPISODE V

The black-winged wife who hovers at our shingling  
has unleashed a series of nightmares—  
night horses riding through florescent screens

Her ears he stopped her mouth he stopped

He goes downstairs for a beer  
and our bed begins to shake

Is the cry outside our window  
the dead wife or a car alarm?

A nightmare is not cured by talking through it

EPISODE VI

In this scene, boys are digging up a grave  
to prove a girl is still alive  
*Pass me the crowbar*

One boy holds a flashlight while the other  
cracks the coffin lid  
I hold the covers to my chin

He goes downstairs for a beer and they  
find only brackish water in her place

EPISODE VII

She weeps beneath our bed  
I smell her there:

musk of five years  
wanting him again

EPISODE VIII

At the bottom of our stairwell is the underworld

where managing her sorrow  
she pretends to be alive

Her ears he stopped her mouth he stopped  
and does he want me dizzy?

Falling through three tenses, I can't find  
my way away from here in the dark

EPISODE IX

Maps take daylight for granted

and other landmarks too  
have come unseen:

The collapse of the town bridge  
means the main road is made of water

A teenager who worshipped the devil  
burnt down the Holy Name last year

It seems there is always one  
building burning in this town

EPISODE X

In unmarked flashbacks, he goes forth  
on fire down the stairs to get a beer

The beer held like a flashlight in his hand  
he finds the kitchen drawers askew  
the wedding china turned to paper plates

EPISODE XI

Before the screen, I'm dreaming  
myself empty

The night the screen outstares

The dead wife who leaves apples in our sheets  
whose hair I pull like taffy from my comb

And does he want me with her?  
ears stopped eyes stopped

What I want is to sleep and wake alone  
with no dream in the middle

EPISODE XII

Many stories have been written  
about houses of the damned

I've gathered a collection of  
small sightings:

The love I've always suspected is a hoax

The way the carpet turns  
to sludge under drunk legs

EPISODE XIII

This scene reveals her  
body opened up:

all terrible pink candles  
lit inside her

And here he comes to raise her  
from the bed  
and through the screen

The beer held in his right hand  
like a crucifix



THE BLIND SIDE: THE SERIES,  
OR WHEN WHITE WOMEN RAISE  
BLACK MEN  
KUSH THOMPSON

she'll find him with eviction  
notices balled in his face.  
offer couch and casserole  
clean shirt  
steamed cous cous and coconut water  
a high ceiling.

the wet nurse was the only soul food.  
so, the 4th time sandra bullock attempted to spoon  
"mama" into her new son's speech,  
she bought a cast iron skillet.  
plopped the word in preserved grease  
until the stove  
spun its conjured pulse.

christian school.  
weekly chapel service.  
choral music elective.  
joel osteen's autograph  
framed in the principal's office.  
jesus  
jogs in the courtyard.

african  
twice removed  
is more orphan  
under layers of last name  
mispronouncing his skin.

regular appointments  
at the local barbershop.

gated community.  
the neighbors know  
his face until  
it rains.

holiday at the big house.  
christmas card portraits  
happy family  
close knit as  
an ugly sweater.  
under the table,  
he feeds the dog  
his pumpkin pie.

the wet nurse was the only soul food  
until peppered milk began to taste like memory  
and

she won't  
compete  
for what she's already won  
in court.  
she won't  
watch her hold him  
like louisiana's drowned breath.  
she won't  
watch him love a blk woman  
if it means losing  
her only  
isaiah.

there is no blk superhero.



mama is people's choice  
favorite humanitarian,  
oscar's  
best actress.

at brunch,  
the book club women  
ask if she's at all worried about her daughter.  
she recites guilted white proverb:  
i don't see color.  
behind her tongue,  
she practices the word  
"son"  
until it bludgeons her mouth  
purple.

whistles are chalkboard nails dragging  
down his skull  
and she won't explain it.

inverted tarzan:  
the first time the boy scouts call him "nigger",  
it's a fire  
in every tree his skin has been  
and she won't know  
which one to put out first.

FINAL DAYS  
CHRISTOPHER PAYNE

As soon as I pulled into the driveway, I knew something wasn't right. The stagnant air was unusually quiet. It was still morning, and the color of the sky had not yet fully returned. Off in the distance, a thin layer of snow dusted the top of Mount San Jacinto. I killed the ignition and sat there a minute in near silence, just the sputter and pops of the car clearing its throat from the two-hour ride into town.

My mother answered the door, eyes swollen and red. She didn't need to tell me; I knew I was too late. I walked down the hallway to the spare room at the end and peered through the doorway. The sun shining through the blinds filled the room with a blue light that looked almost metallic. In the center of the room lay an empty hospital bed made up perfectly with sheets that looked unnaturally white.

It had only been a few weeks since I last saw my father. His knees had become so swollen it made it difficult for him to walk, and at times you could see the edge of his colostomy bag protruding from above his waistline. I pictured him sitting in his recliner, mustering up the strength to smile. "I'm proud of you" he told me. The last words he would say to me, though I didn't know it at the time.

The sunlight began to soften, reflecting off the metal bed frame in little starlike fragments that would grow and then dissipate in almost a single motion.

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